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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001279

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: UK ENVOY ON BURMA ENCOURAGES BETTER THAI ROLE ON BURMA

REF: A. BANGKOK 1205 BURMESE MIGRANTS DEATHS

[1B.](#) BANGKOK 846 MFA PROVIDES READOUT OF PM BURMA VISIT
[1C.](#) BANGKOK 341 EU BURMA ENVOY IN THAILAND

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (C) UK Prime Minister's Special Representative for Burma Michael Williams encouraged the RTG to consider a more proactive role in Burma during his April 16-18 trip to Thailand. During a private meeting with Ambassador John, Williams expressed the UK's shared concern about the current situation in Burma. He said his visit was intended to persuade the RTG to consider options that would lead to a more constructive regional discussion about Burma. In a welcome divergence from recent RTG remarks, Noppadon told the press that "Thailand wants to see a credible referendum process in which everyone takes part." British Embassy Political Chief Andy Garth later told us that Williams was encouraged that the RTG seemed more willing to recognize it should have a role in supporting democratic transition in Burma. The true test of RTG policy will be Thailand's handling of Burmese PM Thein Sein's visit to Thailand April 28-29. End Summary.

BURMA'S LATEST SPECIAL ENVOY ARRIVES IN BANGKOK

¶ 12. (C) Michael Williams, the UK's Special Representative for the Middle East and Special Projects traveled to Thailand April 16-18 to personally deliver UK PM Gordon Brown's views on the situation in Burma. Williams also exchanged ideas with Thai FM Noppadon on April 18 about the role of the region, in particular Thailand, in bringing about political reform to Burma. Unlike EU Burma Envoy Piero Fassino, who undertook a failed mission to Thailand in January (ref B), Williams found the Thais forthcoming about the reality of the situation in Burma and Thailand's relation with the Burmese junta, Garth said. Garth went on to say that Williams had the impression the Thais were embarrassed by PM Samak's comments on the heels of the Thai leader's first official trip to Burma (ref B). At that time Samak praised the Burmese general's devotion to Buddhism and touted Thailand's intention to proceed with "neighborly engagement" as morally superior to the hardline approach favored by Western governments.

¶ 13. (C) Garth relayed to us that Noppadon opened his meeting with Williams by saying that Thailand's relationship with Burma extended beyond economics; he cited the RTG's belief in the importance of democracy and human rights. Noppadon accepted that Thailand needed to play a more forward-leaning role in addressing the current situation in Burma, particularly as the RTG would take over the Chair of ASEAN in July. As an example of his intentions, Noppadon stated that Thailand planned to support moves to pressure the Burmese to issue another visa to UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari in advance of the May 10 referendum on the Burmese constitution. However, Noppadon did not provide any further details about how the RTG would accomplish this or any other specific actions Thailand planned to take on Burma.

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¶ 14. (C) Williams also called on Ambassador on April 17 and met with a broader group of Bangkok-based diplomats over lunch the next day. In both meetings Williams discussed the same concerns that the USG has expressed about Burma's upcoming constitutional referendum. The discussions also explored ideas to encourage ASEAN countries to engage more helpfully, noting in particular Indonesia's efforts, but without reaching any new conclusions.

IMPROVED PUBLIC STATEMENTS

¶ 15. (U) Although they received little coverage, Noppadon's statement to the press following his meeting with Williams may have been the most useful outcome of the visit. Joining Williams for a press conference at the MFA, Noppadon explained that on several occasions he had informed the Burmese FM of Thailand's interest in seeing a credible referendum process in Burma. Noppadon added that he intended to persuade Burma to allow the ICRC to resume activities in Burma after an almost two-year hiatus of ICRC visits to detainees in prisons and labor camps. Noppadon drew a parallel between the recent death of 54 Burmese migrant workers (ref A) and the need for economic development in Burma. Noppadon did not outright oppose sanctions on Burma, but expressed Thailand's preference for engagement and humanitarian support. He concluded that the RTG will reevaluate the situation in Burma following the May 10 referendum and that once Thailand takes over the ASEAN chair (slated for July 2008), the RTG "will have a more prominent role in looking at Myanmar's situation."

COMMENT

¶ 16. (C) It was encouraging to hear Noppadon take a less

combative stance towards Western policy on Burma, even going so far as to highlight that Burma's economic problems affect Thailand. Williams' visit appears to have given Noppadon the opportunity to try to mitigate the effect of some of the disappointing rhetoric from the PM's office in recent weeks. We will be carefully monitoring Thailand's handling of the Burmese PM's visit to Bangkok April 28-29 to gauge to what extent the RTG will transform Noppadon's comments into actions.

JOHN